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"The midnight hour, midsummer-night." P. 109.

ERLING

A TALE

From the Land of the Midnight-Sun

BY

OLA JOHANN SÆRVOLD

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With Illustrations by

EMIL BIORN

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To
Dr. FRIDTJOF NANSEN,
who has been
Farthest North
into those
enchanting regions
of
the midnight-sun,
the following pages
are inscribed
by
THE AUTHOR.

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PRELUDE.

THE home of the Norsemen,
Near the Northpole,
Is a land of light
And a land of darkness.
Slowly the sun
Sinks in the autumn
Below the level,
Leaving the Northzone.—
In days of darkness
Dreams the Northland.

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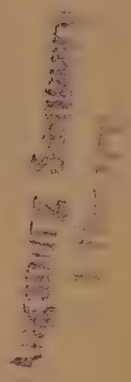
High in the heavens
Hovers the northlight,
Constantly changing
Color and aspect:
Flames flicker
Fearful to look at,
Crackling and hissing,
Crowning the Northpole.—
The lurid northlight
Lights the Northland.

The lowly Lapp
Leaves the valley,
Restlessly roaming,
His reindeer drives.
'Mid the mountains,
Among his people,
The sordid sorcerer
Sells his witchcraft.—
Wily and weird
Are the wise men from Lapland.

Tales are told
Of trolls and kelpies,
Dreaded draugs
Drowning the fisher;
Of the lurking Lapp
Loosening his witchcraft,
Killing and sickening
Cattle and man.—
Then superstition
Sways the Northland!



From yore the Yuletide,
The year ending,
Is given to gladness,
Good-will to all:
The sun from the south
Slowly is turning;
Nearer the Northpole
He nightly comes.—
Soon will his lustre
Illumine the Northland!

In from the ocean,
Up toward land,
Filling the fjords,
The fishes are coming,
Summoned by nature
To spawn on the banks:
Many the millions,
Mighty the force.—
The filled fjord
Is the field of the Northland.

To beach and billow
The birds return
From their trip to the torrid
Tracts of the Southland.
They sweetly sing
That summer is coming;
Their cries fill the air;
They crow in delight.—
Do you think they are telling
Tales from the Southland?

Surely the sun
From the South is coming;
Higher in the heavens
His highway daily.
He nears the Northpole;
Night is retreating:
Doomed is darkness!
Day is supreme!—
The midnight-sun
Smiles on the Northland!

I.

A MOUNTAIN island, inside of the ring
Which separates the temperate zone from that
The Northpole girds, has long contained a church.
Upon the middle of a pleasant plain
It now has stood for many hundred years,
Inviting peace. Almost around the vale
A mighty mountain-symbol of good-luck
Abrupt arises, open to the west
The sun admitting and the ocean breeze.

Where now the vale, was once, in hoary past,
A tranquil bay. But time, all-changing time,

It slowly filled, until, at last, one day
The briny deep retreated, and resumed
Its interrupted course from gulf to pole.
So when the Norsemen built the isle they found
Within the mountain a delightful vale.
And when Christianity was introduced
Among them, here they built the Lord a church,
And round the church an acre dedicated.

A stone's-throw to the southeast from the church
Now stands the parsonage. On either side
Some farmers dwell within their cozy homes.
But at the entrance of the valley, where
Of the old bay is left a little port,
By three small islands sheltered from the sea,
There are the merchant's store and stately dwelling.
Around the port, just opposite the store,
The fishers' modest homes, turf-thatched and low.

Now during May and June each year the youth

Of all the parish gather in this vale
For final preparation for the day
Of confirmation; some fifteen winters old,
While others scarcely fourteen times have seen
The oyster-catcher from the South return;
A few are older, sixteen years or so.
Six weeks they stay, and every week-day morn
Together with the minister they meet—
The church their meeting-place—and in this time
The Bible-history and catechism
Are thoroughly reviewed, each point explained.—
At last a final test, and, if they pass,
The Sunday following they are confirmed:
Then at the altar they renew the vows
Of their baptism, and to communion,
To the Lord's holy supper, are admitted.

Now during their sojourn in the vale,
The government officials' children find
A very pleasant temporary home
At the old parsonage. The poorest class
Have always been content to get a place

Around the harbor in those poor abodes.
Those from the middle class are wont to stay
On either side the valley where a home
Most suited to their wants they can obtain;
Except the richest of them—for to these
The merchant's door is always opened wide.

II.

SOME forty, perhaps fifty years ago,
There stayed down at the merchant's stately home
A maiden fair, to be confirmed that year.—
A little more than average in height;
Nor stout nor slender; full of grace she was
And womanly; her hands were small and white,
Her cheeks were blushing, and her golden hair
Was rich and flowing; from the bluest eyes
There shone a world of kindness and of love.

Upon a little isle, called Indre-ey,
Lying between the mainland and the isle

On which the church, there stood her pleasant
home.
Besides the houses of two fishermen,
To whom the island's southern point was let,
This was the only dwelling on the isle.
Here Inger, this her name, had passed her days,
And seldom had a mate with whom to play,
Excepting spring and fall, when school was held
Beneath her father's roof; five weeks each time.
Then all the children from a neighboring isle,
And from the point, came daily to her home.—
Her father was a staid, God-fearing man:
He often read the Holy Writ of God
Before his house; severe he was, but just.
Her mother her companion was: so good
And loving; taught her first of all of love:
The love of Him who sent His only son
To suffer for all mankind and to die,
So that it might fore'er be saved and free.
She also taught her sympathy and love
For all the race, and charity for the poor.—

Here Inger grew and thus her childhood's home,
Away from which she never yet had been
One single night before she came to stay
On Horseshoe Island, there to be confirmed.
She come a budding girl. The seven weeks
Of contact with the world, of sun and clouds,
Made her a blooming maiden ere she left.

While at the merchant's by the church she lodged,
She roomed with Anna, daughter of the house,
A maiden spirited and full of fun
And jokes and tricks with whomsoe'er she dared.
Oft Inger tried to stay her, but in vain:
No easy task to reason, to rebuke,
To show a sober face when she began.
They were alike in age, near sixteen both,
And both attended the parochial school.
They read together, and, when they were through,
One heard the other. Then they both would sing,
Or play, or dance, or do what most would please.

Now, in a room just opposite to the girls',

On the other side the hallway, lodged two boys:
Both from the mainland, inside of the isle
Where Inger's home. To study they were here,
And, when the day should come, to be confirmed.
The name of one was Per. He was a lad
As lads are most when fifteen years of age.
Two things alone now occupied his mind:
To learn his lessons so that he might pass
The last examination and be free
From minister and lessons and from school;
And, secondly, his thought was, until then,
Each day to learn his lessons just as quick
As he but could, that he might have more time
For fun and play in company with the rest.

The other, Erling called, was the reverse:
Reflective, thoughtful, serious in his ways,
Though sometimes not considerate; seclusive:
He loved the seashore and the mountain heights,
Wherefrom he saw the thousand islands, thrown,
Along the coast as far as eye can reach
In both directions, from the mainland out,

Into the deep Atlantic, forty miles
And more; some lying lonely, others grouped;
And, to one side of some large mountain isle,
There often many smaller in a cluster,
Resembling, from his distant, climbing height,
An eider, followed by her timorous young.—
Here, undisturbed, he liked to sit and think,
And wonder how the outside world might look.
Or, by the seaside, he would often muse
On all the tales of elves and fairies, trolls
And draugs, or kelpies, that he had been told.

III.

A FRIEND had Erling, much older than himself,
Who his companion, and his teacher too
In many things, had been. With Erling's parents
He had his home now almost thirty years;
With them he took his meals, but otherwise
A lonely man. He mostly passed his time
In fishing, when the weather would permit,
Or dressing, washing, salting, smoking fish.
At other times, secluded in his room,
He mended nets and lines. Or he would read,
Or sing, or play his violin; the last

Especially when sad and sorrowful.
When storms were angry on the fjord and bay
In winter, when the night was dark and cold,
And the wind was howling round the house, then seemed
A tempest fiercer yet to rage within.
Then always he would take his violin
And play, apparently to smother, drown
The outer and the inner tempest, but
In fact to revel in sad memories.
In strains most soft and sweet the music came
At first—and later, too, at intervals—
Then moaning, trembling, as if boding some
Great danger, evil, or calamity.
Then suddenly some loud and frightful strains,
A-whistling, creaking, tearing; louder still,
And wilder, while the player's countenance
Would twitch convulsive; thus awhile his play,
Then slow abating, only to recur.
As in a narrow strait with mountain sides
Abrupt arising to a cloudy height,

When it is stormy, and the wind in puffs
Comes rushing, roaring down the rocky sides,
And strikes and twists the water across the strait,
Loosing its force against the other wall,
Ascending, leaving smooth and calm the sound
Below, until another mighty gust.

Now Erling from a tiny boy had spent
Much of his time in Jacob's company,
And always was he welcome to his room,
Where seldom others entered. Here he heard
Many a weird and entertaining tale
From sea and land, which always he devoured
Most greedily. To ken his letters here
He first began, and, later on, he learnt
To play the fiddle, and ere the migrant birds
Had many times departed he surpassed
His master. Sometimes too he was along
Out fishing, setting nets and lifting them,
And lines and tackle. Thus he learnt the trade.

During the craddle-age, when Jacob stopped,
At times while waiting for, or after meals,

To prattle and to play with Erling ere
He left to gain his solitary room,
Their friendship first began. Soon what of love
Was left in Jacob centered in this boy,
As if he were his own, his only son.
And Erling liked his whiskered playmate too.
So when he learnt to walk about he soon
Found Jacob's room; he from this time became
Its daily visitor.—Thus several years.
And Erling liked his lonely friend still more
As he grew older, though he wondered oft
Why Jacob thus lonely, why thus queer at times.
But, although Jacob told him many a tale,
He never yet had told about himself.
And Erling never asked him; for he feared
Thereby to hurt him, as he had inferred
That his condition now was caused by some
Misfortune in the past. He therefore asked
One day his mother, and she told his life:—

"There came no stouter lad nor better liked
By young and old to Horseshoe Island church

Than Jacob Nes when he was young. He owned
His boat and nets, and better fisherman
Could not be found. His partnership was sought
By many more than needed on his boat
Each winter to the Lofot-fisheries.—
The fine paternal farm and home on Nes
He got soon after he became of age,
The year his father died. It was a home
Most pleasant in those happy days when lived
His mother, and his only sister, Magnhild,
Who was six winters younger than himself.
These Jacob dearly loved and stayed at home,
Both spring and summer, tending to the farm,
Or fishing on the fjord close by, except
One summer, when he made a four months' trip
To Bergen with a load of fish and oil.
But every winter, like all others, went
To Lofoten to fish.—He knew more tales
Than any one I know, and oh, how well
He told them! And he played the violin
And danced both well and gracefully. Thus it was

That he most always had to be along
With the other young folks, when he was at
home,
In dances and in other parties too,
And take the lead. Thus many years went by.
But although he had only to propose,
And not a woman in the parish round
Would have refused, but gladly have become
His wife, he did not marry.—Then one fall,
When he was twenty-nine, the rumor came
That he was wooing Sigrid Baldersheim,
A girl of eighteen. Sunday after Yule
The minister proclaimed their banns in church.
Twice yet repeated, and the two were wed.—
It had been Sigrid's wish to wait till spring
At least, or early summer. Jacob had
Agreed to this at first; but Christmas day
He begged her long and pleadingly to have
The wedding ere he left, 'bout Candlemas,
To battle with the elements three months
Upon the Lofot-banks. Reluctantly

She yielded, it is said, as from a child
She oft had dreamt of being a summer bride,
When nature dons her holiday attire.
But as she loved, she yielded to his wish.

"So they were wed a stormy winter day,
And stormy was the morning when from Nes
They started for the church. Accordingly
They had not many in their wedding train.
Now, when they left the church that afternoon,
It was already dark, and sleet and snow
Came rushing from the west and north, and caused
A slow and heavy pull around the point.—
From Horseshoe Island's northern point to Nes
Is seven miles across an open fjord;
The course is northeast. Here the bridal boat
Worked its way across with shortened sails.
The night was dark; no moon; the stars were hid
Behind a sleety veil. The wind abeam,
And o'er the weather-side the briny spray
Came, drenching all on board the laboring boat.

Then, suddenly, when they were half-way 'cross,
The wind came from the north, increased, the
boat
Capsizing as it caught the sail a-back.—
They all, but two, got on the keel, and now
Began a long and dreadful night for those
Who, drenchèd through, lay holding on for life.
For, with the change of wind, it soon became
Mortally cold.—When morning rose at last
The bridegroom held his newly-wedded wife,
And his mother, in his tireless arms embraced;
But both were dead; and dead his sister too.
And of the rest four had been washed away
During that long and dreadful night. At last
The wreck was seen from land, and what was left
Of Jacob's wedding party brought ashore."

Here Erling's mother paused a while and
looked
Her son full in his blue, inquiring eyes.
Then slow resumed: "Your father was along
That stormy night; 'twas he who held, when died,

Fair Magnhild, Jacob's sister, in his arms,
And but for him she would have washed away.
For ever since your father first began
In Lofoten and lodged with Jacob, they
Were best of friends; and oft he went to Nes,
Or Jacob, and his sister too, came here.—
Now twenty years have passed by since that day,
That day of sorrow, when the cold remains
Of Jacob's mother, sister, and his wife
Of but a day were slowly carried up
Into his home, the day before so happy.
It was the last time Jacob entered it;
For on that evening with pneumonia he
Was taken very sick. Your father took
Him home with him, and here he struggled hard,
For several weeks, 'tween life and death. At last
He rose, a shadow of his former self.
He sold his home, his Lofot-boat and nets;
And ever since, here, with his closest friend,
Your father, he has had his second home."

This woeful tale of death, and of the cause
Of Jacob's disappointed life, a mark
Indelibly on Erling's child-soul stamped,
And influenced and shaped his destiny.

IV.

NOW the four students at the merchant's house
Became acquainted very soon and friends.
The first day Per had walked about the port,
The warehouses and store, exploring all,
And Erling kept him company. The next,
When he had learnt his lessons, he proposed
A trip up to a farmhouse, where there lodged
Some youths from their way. Erling was not through,
And said he did not care to go that night.
So Per set out alone. After a while,

When he had read his lessons two times through
Without the book, then Erling took his fiddle
From out his chest, and, after tuning it,
Began to play some sweet and soothing airs.—
A timid tapping at his door. "Come in!"
And in stepped Anna, daughter of the house,
And, close behind her, Inger. "May we come
And sit and listen to your playing here?
We heard your music from the other room,
And thought you played so nicely," Anna said.
He nodded his assent, but was deterred
By bashfulness from speaking. Therefore he
At once resumed his playing. Now and then
He cast a glance at one or other of them —
Seldom at first, but oftener later on.
This Anna noticed soon, and, though she tried
To check her youthful mirth, it nevertheless
Ere long burst wildly forth in merry laugh.
Erling looked up, confused, and ceased to play;
But Anna, always quick, now sobered, said:
"You played so well, and I could not but think

What fun we here could have, if you would play
A waltz; then we would dance." So Erling played,
And Anna and Inger danced; and, while they danced,
Per came and joined them—danced now with the one,
Now with the other of them. Afterwards
They talked and sang, and Erling told a tale.

Thus the first night of their acquaintance passed,
And many like it followed. Erling played
And looked on, while the others danced. And Per
Would dance awhile with each. But more and more,
As time went on, would Erling's watching eyes
Rest lovingly on Inger, though he was
Not conscious of it. Oft he wished that he
Might also dance, and hold within his arms
Embraced, fair Inger, while they stepped the waltz.

And once, or twice perhaps, he got his wish,
When Anna hummed for them a Spanish waltz.—
It was not every evening that they met,
Nor every evening that they met they danced;
Sometimes they sang, or talked, or played at
chess
Or dominoes; or they told fairy tales
In turn. Here Erling was the master. He
Would tell as if he thoroughly believed
Each incident, though e'er so wild and weird;
And often made the others believe them too.
And they would move together as if feared,
And shudder, when he told a fateful tale
Of some poor fisher vainly striving hard
Against the doings of some grudgeful Lapp,
Or some malicious, horrid sea-troll. Thus
It oft became an awful pleasure this,
To listen to him; but strange fascinating.

Now Erling often stopped to muse and think
While reading; well he learnt his lessons too.
But Per was mostly hurrying; thus he

Was always sooner ready with his task,
And took his cap and started for the plain.
But if, when in the hall, he heard the girls
Talking, he at their door would lightly tap,
And if he heard "come in," would go no farther.
But if there came no answer to his rap,
He went up to some farmhouse on the plain
And visited those evenings till 'twas late.—
Some evenings, after Per was gone, the girls,
Anna and Inger, came to Erling's room,
And once, when there, it happened Anna went
To do some work about the house, and left
The two alone. Then Erling felt his heart
Beat with a sudden rapture of delight,
Though not yet clearly conscious of its cause.
He looked at her and caught her large blue eyes,
And, blushing, asked her: Should he play for her?
He just remembered some fine melodies
That he not yet had played for them? She smiled

And nodded: Would he be so kind? Then down
She looked. No more was said. And he began
To play some sweet and soft folk-melodies,
In minor key, peculiar to the land.
He played. She listened; more and more she felt
The sweetness, power of those simple notes:
Sad, tremulous, alluring, hopeful, glad.

But as she listened more and more her thoughts
Turned from the music to the one who played.
She looked at him and at his manly face,
Whereon the expression changed as changed the tones:
As if it were his inner self he played:
His passions, fears, and hopes he did unfold.—
Then suddenly she blushed and turned away.
For, all at once, it dawned upon her mind
That it was she he meant, his love for her
He now expressed in his own singular way.
She saw it as he looked into her eyes

"He played; she listened." P. 40.

And held them for a moment while he played.
And, what was more, she had returned the look,
And felt a sweet sensation at the time.
She now perceived it all and felt ashamed,
And therefore blushed and turned her head away.
She thought of what had happened. Did she love?
Yes, did she love the boy? Or why so pleased
When first she noticed it? And even now?
How did she know 'twas she he meant? It might
Be some one else he thought of while he played
And looked at her; or none at all, perhaps.
'Twas only her illusion that he did!
At any rate it mattered naught as yet
Whether 'twas she or some one else or none.
But more that she was pleased, and showed it too,
When first she thought 'twas she. She, yet a child!
Not yet confirmed! What would her mother say?

What would the rest say, if they noticed it?
What had occurred might well occur again
In others' presence, if she did not guard
Her words and actions; always bear in mind
Her mother's words: To guard 'bove all her looks!
She knew now that she liked him from the night
When she and Anna went to hear him play;
And more as time went on. But was it love?
Deny it? But could she deceive herself?
And he had noticed it? The thing to do
Was to avoid him till she was confirmed.
Not shun him. Far from it! But to take care
And never be alone with him. Perhaps
She now had better leave the room, she thought.
Then she heard Anna come to her relief.—

Some distance up the mountain which surrounds
The valley is a cavern, large and deep;
And people say that it was made by man:
When, centuries ago, a church was built

Upon an island sixty miles away,
Then stone was taken from the mountain here
To build it with—and thus the cave was made.
To gain the cave is somewhat difficult;
The ascent is steep and strewn with loosened
rocks,
Giving uncertain foothold. So the cave
Is seldom visited by any one.

Up to this cave the four had planned a trip
One Sunday, when the pastor was away
For service at his other parish-church.—
So on that Sunday afternoon they went,
Erling and Per ahead, and arm-in-arm,
A little ways behind, the other two,
Until they came to the most arduous path,
Where it was planned the boys should help the
girls
In the ascent, if needed. Here they stopped.—
It had been Erling's secret hope to aid,
In the ascent, fair Inger; thus become
Her partner for the day. This Inger feared.

She, apprehensive of her inner self,
Fearing his glance, his touch, so managed it
That Per became her partner for the day.—
Then Erling felt a pang, and thought that Per
Had been soliciting her company;
And he who till that time had been so glad
And joyful, talking as they walked along,
Now, helping Anna, quietly worked his way
Up to the cave; but watching, all the while,
Inger and Per who slowly came below.
And when they reached the cave he sat alone
And rested, looking at the plain below,
The ocean, and the islands far and near,
Forgetting, for the time, his disappiontment.
But, when he glanced to where the others sat,
He felt the pang again within his heart: —
Here he had hoped to sit by Inger's side
And tell her how he oft had sat before
Upon the highest mount above his home,
Where he so well could view their rugged coast:
Clear from the Seven Sisters to the south,

And to the Lofot Isles, whose azure peaks
From there would rise above the northern deep.
Now she was sitting by the side of Per,
And listening to his silly talk. She smiled
And laughed, apparently enjoying it!
He cared not where she sat, with whom she talked,—
He tried to assure himself.—And yet he cared.
And very much he cared. 'Twas jealousy
Which now began to rend his youthful heart.

That evening Erling took his violin
And played as he had never played before.
It was his first attempt to play such tunes
As Jacob used to play on stormy nights.
Not that he thought of Jacob while he played,
Nor tried to imitate; nor played the same.
Spontaneous notes they were, expressing grief,
And agitation, and but little hope.
And Inger, hearing this, well understood
Its cause and meaning, and felt sorry for him.
So, when they were together in his room

The following night, she tried to cheer him up,
And, in her own sweet, feminine way, she did,
And no one noticed it, not even he.—
Thus he became his former self again.
But later, when Per asked him to play a waltz,
And they would dance, then said he, bluntly, "no!
He played no more for dancing; did not think
It right for them to dance, while they were here!"
And nothing, after that, could change his mind,
Though Per and Anna tried it several times.

So passed the days and weeks in play and work
Until the last, the confirmation day,
When they were all confirmed, and all went home,
To start in real life, just now begun.

V.

THE summer went, and stormy autumn came,
When migrant birds start for their winter homes
Along the Nile.—One morning Erling came
Down to the shore he missed the wonted cry
The oyster-catcher used to greet him with,
And found the beach deserted. Looking up,
He saw a flock of geese high in the blue
Above the mountain-peaks; one in the lead,
The others following in two spreading lines,
Bound for their Afric and Italian haunts.—
Then sad felt Erling, lonely and depressed,

And to his memory came one autumn day,
Some years before, when he was twelve years old:
He sat upon the mount above his home.
'Twas Sunday. Far below on fjord and sound
Appeared, like little specks, the many boats,
Conveying people from the many homes
To church, to worship the almighty God.
Calm was the day and still; he almost heard
The oars play in the locks as people rowed
And slowly worked their way to Horseshoe Isle.
The mountain-heights were then already brown,
The grass was sleeping, lulled by the polar breeze.
But on the sides, by birch-trees covered, there
The color varied: red and golden leaves
So far as the first frost had reached; below,
A zone of yellow foliage, mixed with green;
Then came a narrow belt of darker hue,
Where green predominated, although there
Were many golden birches; near the shore

The trees were yet untouched by Arctic blasts,
But 'tween the groves the fields were yellow-white.
Now, while he sat there lost in thought, he heard
Above his head the cries of many birds,
And, looking up, he saw a flock of geese,
The first that fall. But soon another came.
Another; many more; all headed south.
Then wished he that he borrow might their wings,
And follow to the sunny southern lands,
And see the world, of which he oft had dreamt.
His home upon his native shore, where soon
All nature would be sleeping many months,
A prison seemed; the mounts its awful walls.—
He almost wept that day as he went home.

Each autumn since he had had similar thoughts
And longings, although less and less intense.
And now he knew all nature did not sleep,

Not even in that darkest week of all,
When, several days, the sun his shortened course,
Across the southern sky, entirely ceased :

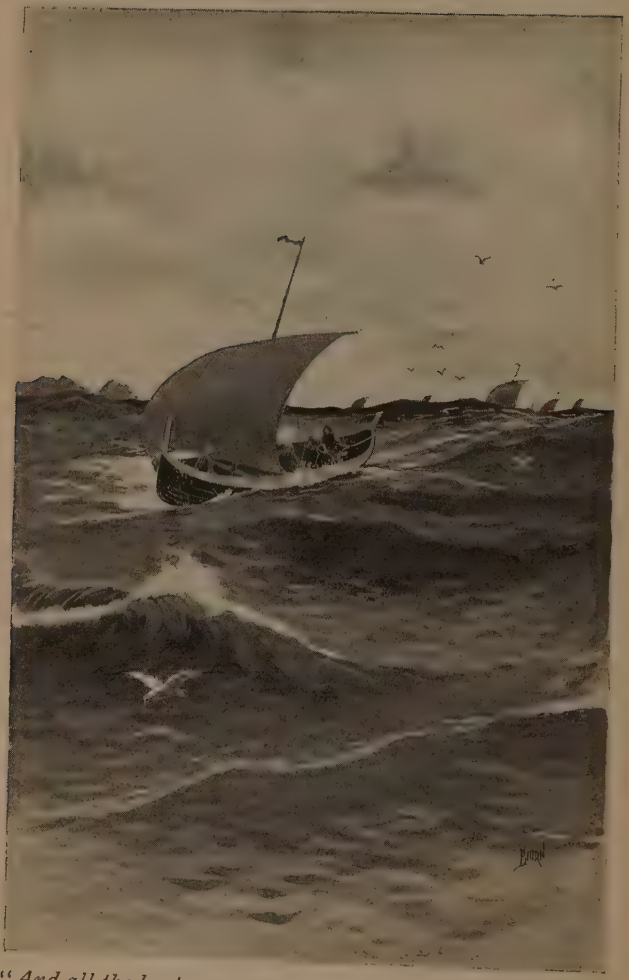
The deep, blue ocean never ceased its course.
In winter as in summer always there ;
The same forever ; bringing warmth and health
And life and plenty to the rugged coast ;
Severe at times, aye, sometimes taking life ;
And yet a friend ; most when in winter time
The sun deserted ; then the ocean teemed
With life, inviting all to come and cast
Their nets, and thus forget the sleeping land.—
And Erling loved the ocean for the same,
And did not fear to trust himself and his
Upon its heaving bosom. Now he longed
For winter, when, upon the Lofot-banks,
The busy fishing season would begin,
And he, like other youths confirmed, as did
Their fathers 'fore them, there to fish should start.

VI.

UP from the Arctic sea the islands rise.
First one alone, an outpost from the rest;
Some miles of ocean; then a larger isle;
Another sound, world-famous by report,
Through which the Maelstrom hurls with mighty force,
And swishes, boils, and twists, and twirls, and roars,
And shakes the land on either side adjoining.—
Then the grand mass of barren mounts sublime,
Of rugged peaks in contact with the clouds,
Of mountain isles, by long and narrow straits,

With sides abrupt arising heavenward,
Divided. Inlets 'long their shores, and bays,
By points and islets sheltered, where the boats
And vessels find a haven from the seas,
Secure and snug, most hidden from the view.
Around the ports, upon the narrow shore
Left by the climbing mountains, there the booths,
The winter homes of all the fishermen
Who congregate to fish upon the banks
That stretch along the islands' southern sides.

The life, activity which Erling found
Upon the banks, in port, on sea and land,
His boldest expectations, hopes, surpassed—
And most when in the mornings all the boats
Lay waiting at the entrance of the port
To hurry out to lift their nets or lines
As soon as from the flagstaff on the point
The sign should come. And outside of the port!
There, if the wind was fair, to view the fleet,
The thousand boats sail out from every cove
As far as eye could reach in both directions,



"And all the boats were speeding for their ports." P. 57.

Bound for their daily task upon the banks,
Astern, that boldly climbing mountain range,
Ahead, the broad expanse of resting sea,
To Erling beautiful, sublime appeared!
And grand, though awe-inspiring, when the fleet,
While lifting nets and lines, by howling wind,
And rain, and seas, was driven from the banks,
And all the boats were speeding for their ports,
Urged on by heaving waves that, from astern
Came rolling, always higher as it seemed,
Ready to bury 'neath their curving tops
The craft and crew, but, passing underneath,
The vessel lifting, would arise ahead
And almost hide the mountain range from view!

On holidays, or when the murky fjord
Is agitated by a southwest gale,
And waves roll very high, and no boat ventures
Beyond the point, then stay within their booths
The fishermen: Some mending nets or lines,
Some reading, others writing letters home:
Husband to wife; the youth to mother writes,

But most to friends—to girls he knows and likes.—

But Erling never wrote; he would have writ;
He would have liked to write, and often too,
And most of all to Inger on the isle,
But did not dare; and so he wrote to none,
Not even to his mother, nor his sire,
Nor sister, brother, though they often wrote.
He thought he could not write, when not to her,
And, therefore, only sent them word and greeting.

He long had known he passionately loved
Fair Inger Indre-ey. He strongly felt
That life, and not with her, would not be life:
Only a passing 'long a public road,
From where he well might see the joyful life
On either side; the many happy homes,
And—since he her had known—could understand
What joy and pleasure there; but never feel,
And never live the joyful life they lived.
He thought of Jacob: gloomy and alone,

And almost friendless. Shuddering he felt,
If she should not be his, his lot would be
A lonesome wanderer's on a dreary road.

Now Erling was a meditative lad
From early boyhood. Soon he learnt to think;
But all his thoughts were nourished by his friend—
His sad and gloomy friend. His mental food
Was woeful tales of disappointed lives,
And evil-doers, both on land and sea,
And evil deeds, and sorrow, sickness, death.—
His home was pleasant, to be sure, and good:
His father kind; a man of deeds, not words;
His mother loving; oft she sang while she
Attended to her many household duties.
He had a sister whom he dearly loved,
But seldom spoke to; mostly she who talked,
When they conversed; two brothers, twelve years one,
The other two years younger than himself,
He little knew, and less he understood,

Their natures being opposite to his.
He not their playmate: Jacob was his all,
The molder of his mind and character,
And Erling's home could never counteract
His influence. So Erling's view of life
Was gloomy, and gloomier still the view became
After that day up to the island cave,
When Inger chose as partner for the day
His comrade Per. So, when he understood
The true condition of his beating heart,
'Twas not so much of winning Inger's love,
And hand, and her as his wedded wife, he thought;
But more of never winning her: his lot,
What he should do, what would become of him,
If she another man should love and wed.

Since confirmation-Sunday he had met
Her several times at church, and spoken with her.
He afterwards had hoped for many days,
And felt how happy they would be when wed,

And planned where they should live: would re-
arrange
The house at home; would put another light
Beside the one now in the southern wall
Of their big sitting-room; between the two
Would place a bureau, such as he had seen
While staying at the merchant's; and a glass,
A large and costly mirror, 'bove the bureau.
And other changes; other things would buy.—
With these and similar thoughts his busy mind
Was occupied a week or more, perhaps,
After each meeting with the girl he loved.
But soon his gloomy mood would come again:
He would begin to fear she liked him not,
And doubt that he could ever win her love.

So Erling doubted, hoped, and feared, and
loved,
But did not speak his love: her answer feared.
And thus he never wrote, when others wrote,
On stormy days that year in Lofoten.

VII.

'TWAS March. The fourth successive day
Of southwest gales, and rain, and curving waves.
The mountain heights, which had been veiled in white,
Now, like a hare in spring, were changing hue,
And fast becoming brown.—Upon the point,
The weather prospects for the following day
Discussing, stood a crowd of fishermen.—
Within the booths 'twas quiet. Many slept—
Now tired of writing, and of mending nets—
Upon their bunks nailed on the murky walls.

In Erling's booth were sitting several men
Besides the crew of six which there were lodged.
Of the bad weather they had talked, but now
Their talk had turned to draugs, those sea-trolls feared,
And to the sorcerers 'mong the Lappish race.
An ancient fisherman 'twas now who spoke:—
"I have no doubt the wise among the Lapps,
The sorcerers, can do superhuman things.
Though of their power and witchcraft much I've heard
In all my years I have but little seen.
But once—it was the winter that I fished
From Uré, second station east of here:
'Tis now just seven winters since—I saw
And heard what I shall ne'er forget, though I,
Which God forbid! be twice my present age:
Among our crew there was that year a man
From Ranafjord, 'bout thirty years of age;
A pleasant man, well liked by every one,
Though he was only hired and worked for pay—

We others being sharemen, owning our nets.—
One stormy day we sat within our booth
And talked as now—we had some visitors—
He sat unusually sad and still,
Depressed and often sighing. All at once,
In husky voice: 'Oh, how I wish I knew
How now my wife is getting on at home!'
Some asked him why? He spoke: 'My home
is lonely,
Five miles from nearest neighbor by the fjord.
And now the fjord is frozen; not strong enough
To carry man or beast; it seldom is.
And now my wife is sick! I know she is!
She told me so before I left. She said:
"The second week of March I shall give birth
To our fourth child." And now we write the
tenth.
And now she's very sick, she always was,
Last time we thought would die. And none to
help!
She sick and with the little ones alone!

I had to go to gain our livelihood.'—
There was a Lapp among our visitors
Belonging to another fishing crew.
He had been silent. Now he spoke and said:
'Easy to ascertain how she is now.
If you will all be quiet, never speak,
Nor say my name, nor touch me while I'm gone,
Then I will very shortly let you know.'
Then prone upon the floor he threw himself,
His arms around his head, hiding his face.
His body soon began to twitch and draw
Convulsive. Inarticulate sounds we heard,
And groans. Then he was quiet, lay like dead.—
Intense the stillness of the breathing room.
All eyes were fixed upon the lifeless man.

"I do not know how long a space of time
Thus passed until the Lapp began anew
To twitch and groan. At last he rose and said,
With perspiration on the ghastly face:
'Your wife is well—is convalescing fast.
She now is eating, sitting up in bed.

To her a midwife tends; for yester eve
To you a child, a healthy son, was born.'
This said, he left the room, went to his booth.—
But two weeks later then the Lapp's report,
By letter from the wife, was verified."

"'Twas an exception to the general rule.
'Tis mostly evil, seldom good, they do,
And oft for pay, or else in spite they do it,"
Another fisher said, and thus continued:
"A Lapp hight Lars. A man from Gilleskaal,
Named John, had drunk his liquor. When the Lapp
Accused him of the theft, he flat denied.
The Lapp with ill to threaten then began.
To feel secure against the sorcery,
John soundly, with a cudgel, drubbed the Lapp.
Enraged he rose, with many grewsome threats,
And went to Jockmock, 'cross the Swedish line,
Where he a well-known Lappish sorcerer saw.—
One day John's horse fell stone-dead to the ground

Most suddenly, and John was taken sick.
'Twas cancers in the bowels. He was brought
To Bodey to the hospital, where soon,
In the most frightful agonies, he died.—
When Lars returned from Jockmock, he was told
How John had fared, and, asking day and hour,
He said, rejoicing: 'Then it traveled fast!'"

Another fisher, young in years, next spoke:—
"There lived in Nesné parish, near the church,
Some years ago, a maiden just confirmed.
Like other girls, she many wooers had,
For she was beautiful as the midnight-sun.
They hovered round her as the bees a rose,
At home, at church, and on the public road.—
Some years thus passed, till she was twenty-one,
And all her suitors one by one had left.
But two were always welcome, for it seemed
She knew not which of them she liked the best.
And oft they came; one watched the other one
As jealously as ever rivals did:
Paul hight the one, the other Thorvald called,

And stouter lads were not in Nesné then.
Thorvald was rich. He owned the father-farm
Across the bay, and money in the bank.
And Paul was well-to-do, though not so rich
As was his rival, but lived near her home.—
Another year thus passed, and yet the girl
Had not decided whom to give her hand,
And yet the two were coming, for they loved;
The ardor in their breasts was yet ablaze.—
Then Christmas came, and at her father's house
There was a party on the second day.
There it was noticed that she only once
With Thorvald danced, but many times with
Paul.
But Thorvald kept his passion and his head,
Refused the bowl, and danced with other girls
Till early morning, when the party broke;
Then it was seen his face was deathly pale.

"A few days later Thorvald went away,
Alone, at night, upon his little boat,
And no one knew whereto—he never told;

Was gone a week, and then returned one night.—
Upon the thirteenth day of the new year,
When Paul should rise, he could not move his legs.
Palsied, the doctor said, when he was called;
Would, likely, never more be well again.—
As all things human change, so changed this girl:
Who had been wooed so long, now wooed herself,
For Thorvald stayed away; he saw her not
Before he went to Lofoten that year.
So she a letter wrote to him and said:
'What she could not decide now fate had done.'—
When, in the spring, he had returnèd home,
The pastor soon proclaimed their banns in church,
And on a rainy May day Thorvald led
Her from the altar as his wedded wife.—
In August, on the thirteenth day, Paul sat,

As was his custom now on sunny days,
Upon his little lounge, outside the house,
Along the southern wall, where scorched the sun,
And to the sun he bared his palsied legs,
And from the ground took mold to rub them with,
As he had often done before to pass
The creeping time, while he was sitting thus.—
Now on this August day the mid-day sun
Scorched more than usual; so Paul lay down,
And pulled his straw hat o'er his face. Then came
A gust and blew the hat out on the field,
And Paul, forgetting his disease, arose
And ran to fetch the hat.—His legs were sound.

"In Red-ey parish, on a little isle,
There dwells a Lappish sorcerer, all alone.
To him, so people thought, Thorvald had been
Last new-year, when he made the eight days' trip,
And paid him well to make his rival sick
With palsied lower limbs for seven months."

VIII.

'TWAS late in May, and Pentecost —
"A month
Since he returned from his initial year
Upon the banks of Lofoten; and yet
He had not seen the one who day and night,
Waking and dreaming, occupied his mind.
When he his winter-quarters left he wished
Fair wind and strong, a speedy passage home:
He longed to see her, speak with her again.
And now a month had passed since his return!—
Two weeks ago he was to church, but then
She was not there; it was a stormy day.

But now 'twas Pentecost, the weather fine,
And all who could to-day at church would be.
She and her parents would be there, he knew,
And he should meet her!"
Thus ran Erling's thoughts,
As gently 'cross the fjord on Whitsunday,
Before an easy breeze, the church-boat glided.

And Erling met her. As he slowly walked
Along the graveled road from strand to church,
He saw two maidens coming arm-in-arm
Down from the merchant's house. He knew them both:
Anna the one, and Inger Indre-ey.
He stopped and waited; violently beat
His youthful heart and forced his fervid blood
Up to his head. He greeted Anna first,—
She was the nearest, so he grasped her hand—:
"How are you? And your parents? Well, I hope!"
But not a word to Inger could he say:
Into her eyes he looked, as if to read

His future there, and strongly pressed her hand,
And knew not that the pressure was returned—
And then again to Anna turned and spoke.—

But Inger his behavior toward her
Had noticed well, and well she understood
His silence and its cause; and she rejoiced.

Inger and Erling's sister Ingelborg
Were friends. Now on this day of Pentecost
The two arranged that Ingelborg should sail
From church with Inger; stay with her a day,
And thus repay a visit Inger made
In winter. On the following afternoon
Erling should come upon his little boat
And, in the evening, bring his sister home.

"I shall go early," Erling thought, as home
The church-boat sped before the western breeze;
"Perchance I then, during the afternoon,
May have a chance to talk with her alone,
And ascertain what may expel my doubts."

But on the morrow morn he changed his mind:

"I cannot learn the leaning of her heart,
Its inclination, when we are her guests,
My sister and myself; nor can I ask
If she me love; 'tis not the proper time;
I might impair my cause and chance, if now
I should her ask and tell her of my love.
I'm yet too young, a boy, not seventeen,
And I must therefore wait another year."

So it was late, the evening sun had passed
The westmost compass-point ere Erling left
The boat-house landing on his tiny craft.—

The girls had waited for him long, had thought
He would come early. So, at last, they went
Upon an elevation of the isle,
From where they well could see across the fjord,
To look for him. 'Twas then already late;
And yet an hour passed by before they saw
The little boat come forth around the point.
Then Inger said: "Come, let us take our boat
And row a while, and meet him on the fjord,

The weather is so calm and mild, and I
Can easily row home again alone."— —

Long lay the boats and drifted side by side
Upon the dark and calm and glassy deep,
Wherein, reflected, hung the islands round,
And mountains, reddened by the evening sun.
Long did the girls and Erling talk and much,
Yet, when they parted and went home again,
It seemed he knew no more of Inger's mind
Than he had known before. But more he loved,
And felt that it must sure be she, or none.—
But stronger than before he also felt
That he was yet too young to speak of love,
That he was yet a child compared with her,
Although he was the older. He must wait
Another year and few months more, until
He should be eighteen, and should be of age.

The summer passed and autumn. Erling met
Inger at church, and other places too,
And spoke with her—but never spoke his love.

IX.

THE following fishing season on the banks
Of Lofoten Erling sailed his father's boat
On which, the year before, he'd served his time—
Though even then an able fisherman—
Learning the landmarks 'mong the mountain peaks,
And when and where and how to set the nets.—
Now he was chief, or headman, as it's called,
And luck was with him. Several times his boat
Was deeply loaded when he came in port.
And when, in spring, he and his crew went home,
Their shares were 'mong the very best that year.

X.

NOW Erling's father owned a vessel-share,
A fourth part of a coaster, called a jaekt,
Employed in freighting fish from Lofoten,
And oil, to Bergen, on the southern coast.

It is a custom there to make a trip
Upon a jaekt to Bergen once at least
While one is young; and none is thought a man
Ere he has made this customary trip.—
It takes a summer: three, four months, or more,
From spring till autumn, when the storms begin.

This summer Erling was to make the trip:
The jaekt should sail from home the third of June,

Bound for their Lofot-station, and begin
To load with wind-dried cod upon the twelfth;
And by the last of August Erling hoped
To have returned—their vessel being swift
And staunch.—

"Then he would speak," so Erling thought.
"Last winter he was headman on their boat,
And soon he should have made his Bergen tour,
And ere he should return he should have passed
His eighteenth birthday, therefore be of age,
A boy no longer, but a man 'mongst men.
Then neither youth nor doubt should him deter
From wooing whom he silently had loved;
Then he would speak and tell her of his love,
And ask her to become his own—his wife.

"While in the city he would buy a ring
And many other gifts: he wished he had
The measure of her finger for the ring—
But, likely, he could get the measurement
From Ingelborg, his sister, for her hands
Were small as Inger's; he might also buy

A ring for her, and only tell her that,
When he should take the measure of her finger.—
And while in Bergen he would also buy
The bureau, and the costly looking-glass,
And all the other great and little things
Of which he oft had thought. If all went well
Then they might marry in the following spring;
Why should they longer wait? So it was best
To do the buying now he had the chance."

Thus Erling's thoughts would run most every day,
When it had been decided he should make
The tour that year to Bergen on the jaekt.—
He from his sister got her finger's size,
And told her he would buy a ring for her.
He felt elated, glad, and full of hope,
And thought the world was beautiful and good—
Much better than he ever knew before.

XI.

THE seeond day before the jaekt should sail
Per came and spent the day: the morning hours
On board the vessel with his former chum,
Looking her slowly over, while they brought
To memory their confirmation-days.—
After the mid-day meal, when Erling went
On board again, now busy bending sail
And doing sailor-work, then Per remained
And visited at home with Ingelborg,
And with her mother, till the drooping sun
Was drawing near the western island-peaks.

When Per at last was going home, he stopped
A while on board the jaekt. At his request
The two, Erling and Per, went down below
Into the roomy cabin. Here Per asked
Erling to buy a ring in Bergen for him:
"I want a costly and a pretty ring,
A ring to last, a ring of solid gold;
This is the size I want." And saying this
He from his pocket drew a ringlet made
Of brazen wire, such as a fisher uses
Upon his fishing-line, next to the hook.
"Now will you buy one for me in the city?"
And Erling said: "Yes. I will buy a ring,"
And took the wire and put it in his purse.—
"Thanks! You can get a better finger-ring,
And better know, in Bergen, what you get,
Than I could, buying at the Bjoern Fair.
For I am going to the fair this year
With Gunnar Indre-ey, who plans to take
His Lofot-boat. And Inger too will go;
Eleven others with them; twelve with me;

Last Sunday afternoon it was decided."—
As Erling nothing said, Per with "Good-bye!
A pleasant journey! Welcome back again!"
Departed, hoisted sail, and started home.

Stunned, Erling sat upon the narrow bench
Within the cabin: hardly knew that Per
Had grasped his hand and said the parting words.
Bewildered sat he there, and stupefied,
And stared, an empty stare, as when a man
Is suddenly struck a very heavy blow
Most unexpected; knows, and knows not, whence
Nor why it comes, nor what it does portend,
And, knowing, is surprised and overawed.

Thus Erling sat long after Per had left.
Was conscious, and not conscious; could not move.
At last he slowly from his pocket drew
His purse, and from the purse the brazen ringlet,
And on the smallest finger of his hand
He tried it; quickly and excitedly

Then from a tiny pouch within the purse
Another ringlet, and with tremulous hands
Compared the two—they were of equal size.
Then o'er the cabin table Erling drooped
And groaned and cried: "Shall thus it end?
Shall thus
My fondest hopes be scattered, and my life!
It can't be true, it must not! Yet it is.—
The measure he me gave, the brazen ring,
Was measured on her finger—Inger's finger!
For none but Inger has such tiny hands,
So delicate; the others work too much.—
Her finger's measure, and with her consent!
She is engaged, betrothed, and to Per!
'I want a ring to last,' he said, 'to last!'
It is the wedding-ring—her wedding-ring!
And I to buy it! Oh, too hard! too hard! — —
— — — — — — — — — — — — — —
— — — — — — — — — — — — — —

"My ill-forebodings and my doubts come true.
What shall become of me? What shall I do?

Shall as a shadow, like my poor old friend,
I lone and gloomy go until the end?
Now woo her whom I hoped to be my wife,
Now speak my love would be a fruitless strife.
Jacob too hasty was, and I too late;
Our lots, it seems, were thus ordained by fate.
Now we can sit upon his lonely loft,
Together play those stormy tunes and soft."— —

That evening Erling went to Jacob's room
And took his fiddle, said: "Now let us play!
'Tis fit that we should play together hence.
Come, let us play your stormy tunes and soft!"
And 'gan to play, and Jacob knew the notes:
They were his own, or similar to his own—
And was surprised, and listened for a while,
Was saddened, took and joined his youthful friend.

So these two played together on the weird
Hardanger instruments, and ne'er before
Were heard such notes within this gloomy room:
Heart-rending, sad, despairing, void of hope.
As when the loon a still and quiet night

Sends up his boding cry upon the fjord ;
Or when the circular saw the marrow strikes
And cuts in twain the log upon the mill.

Suddenly Erling ceased to play. He rose
And threw his violin, and out he rushed.
"No, no! I can't!" he cried, and almost joyful :
"I'm yet too young to bury myself alive!"
And sought the mountain heights above his home :
His wonted haunts on sad and happy days.—
Slow the ascent and steep ; from off his brow,
His weary brow, the sweat streamed down his face ;
But on he worked, upwards, until he reached
His wonted nook, and there lay down to rest.—

'Twas nearing midnight. To the north the sun
Was slowly sinking, blushing like a maid,
As were it for the lateness of the hour.
Into its northern ocean bed it sank
To doze a little ere again it rose
Another lengthy summer day to start.—

In serious meditations Erling lay:
"What should he do? Abandon hope and life?
Himself for life surrender to despair?
And live like Jacob, gloomy and alone,
Sequestered from the world and happiness?
Ah no! He could not! Better death would be
Than such a life! And yet, what could he do?
Was Inger not engaged? No longer free?
And could he woo her yet and win her love?
Ah no! It was too late, his chance was lost!
For had not Per her measure for the ring?
And, even were she not betrothed yet,
He knew she loved, would give her "yes" to Per,
When he should ask; for she would ne'er allowed
Her finger's measure to be taken by him,
Thus give him hope which she could not sustain,
Had she not loved him, thoughtful as she was,
Considerate to others, kind and true.—
And they were going to the Bjoern Fair,
So Per had said, upon her father's boat,
And there together spend the market week—

Then they would be engaged, if not before.
Engaged to Per!—He could not understand
How she could love him, he so boisterous,
So restless, childish, so unlike herself.— —
Married to Per! O fates unmerciful!
Purchase for Per his Inger's wedding-ring,
Invited to their wedding festival,
And ever know her as Per's wedded wife!
Too hard to bear! Much worse than Jacob's lot!—
Why was it Per she loved? Why not himself,
Who loved her more than Per could ever do?
Why did he meet her, learn to love her so,
If it were foreordained she Per should wed?— —

— — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

But was it destined thus by cruel fate?
Why fate reproach, when he himself, perhaps,
Was most to blame? What had he done to win
Her prized affection and her heart and hand?
Nothing. Nor spoke had he or writ. While Per
Had evidently never lost a chance.— —

What he himself had done was worse than naught:
He played so Per could dance with her; he planned
The trip up to the cave: his first defeat,
When Per became her partner for the day.
And since? So little had he done, that Per
Had never as his rival thought of him,
Or he would ne'er have asked him buy the ring.—
How could he fate reproach? Or Inger? Per?—
His life was ruined, ruined by himself.
O dreadful truth!—What should, what could he do?
Must he despair?—Could nothing yet be done?—
— — — — — — — — — — — — — — —
— — — — — — — — — — — — — —"

Long thus lay Erling, agitated now,
Now almost calm in thought. At last he rose,
With firm though grieved determination pressed
Upon his worn but youthful countenance.—
'Twas almost morning: from the northeast sky

The sun was pouring down his brilliant rays
Upon the sleeping, soon awakening land.
So Erling hurried home to seek his bed:
Not sleep, that was impossible, he well knew,
But rest a little ere the others rose.

XII.

ON board the jaekt that forenoon Erling asked
The skipper: Were it possible to delay,
And could he find some pretext to postpone
A day the time set for their leaving home?
And would he do it? Some future day, perhaps,
He might be able to do him a turn again.
And to the skipper's question if it were
Of mighty import to him this delay,
He firmly thus: "The weightiest of my life.
But this, you'll understand, is but for you."
After a moment's thought the skipper said:

"We'll see. I think that we can find a cause."
And at the mid-day table: "We won't be ready
To sail to-morrow. There are some little things
That must be done to-day, and ere we sail
I must go home a half-day at the least.
But on the following forenoon we will start."

In the evening when the others sought their beds,
Then Erling to his mother: "Do not look
For me to-morrow. I shall be away
From home all day, perhaps," and asked her store
A basket with provisions for a day.
Then to the boat-house, took his little boat,
With oars and mast and sail, and off he rowed. —

To north from Horseshoe parish twenty miles
There is an islet cluster, far from land.
Upon the northmost island of the group,
Resembling an enormous ant-hill, stood
A crumbling turf-hut: on the sunny side
It had an entrance three feet high, a door

Hanging on wooden hinges: near its side
A little window with a lonely pane.—
'Twas after noon. The day was warm. No one
Within the hut; an ancient padlock held
The lowly door; but outside, so that none
Could gain the hut, unless he him awoke,
Lay Erling, sleeping and in troubled dreams.

Already many hours he thus had lain.—
When in the forenoon he had come and found
The door was locked, and gone its owner's boat,
And smoking coals upon the hearth within,
He understood the man was out to fish,
And, being tired, he, near the door, lay down
To sleep until the fisher should return.

'Twas late, the drooping after-midday sun
Already o'er the western ocean stood
Before the lonely dweller of the isle,
The Lappish sorcerer, landed with his boat;
And, seeing Erling's boat high on the land,—
When Erling came 'twas high-tide; low-tide
now,—

He knew that some one had been waiting long
To see him; so he hurried to his hut.—
As he drew near, his sea-boots stamping hard,
Erling awoke, arose, and greeted him;
Then, with an effort: "I have heard you know
The Lappish craft of sorcery: at will
To sicken people; make them well again.
If this be so, I have a task for you?"—
"So people say," replied the Lapp, "but come
Within the hut and tell me what you want."—
When inside, Erling told the sorcerer
What of his tale he thought he needs must know,
And what he wanted done, and thus concluded:
"You paralyze one side; but understand
It must be painless! There must be no pain
Connected with the sickness, with the palsy!
And have it so appear it is for life,
Until I shall return to you again,
And shall demand the palsy taken off.
Can you do this? And painless? Positively?
And well again? And healthy as before,

When I return and ask it in the fall?
'Tis well. So take this now, and twice as much
I'll give you when I come to you again."

Ere long sat Erling in his little boat,
Speedily wafted homeward by the breeze,
Increasing from the north; and as the sun
Another day began he landed home,
And sought his bed to get a troubled rest.

Five hours later Erling stood depressed
On board the jaekt "Maria," northward bound,
And saw his native home, far to the south,
Vanish behind the point that makes the bay.

XIII.

NOW Inger Indre-ey had, since the time
She first with Anna went within his room
To hear him play upon his violin,
Loved Erling, though a while she knew it not.
Nor would believe it till that other night,
When Anna left, and he had by his play,
And by his glance, his love for her revealed.—
Since then, and more so since she was confirmed,
Her love was conscious, and she cherished it:
She loved and hoped that he some day would come
To Indre-ey and ask her heart and hand.

She knew the custom 'mong the boys: To write
In winter home from Lofoten to girls
Of their acquaintance whom they liked or loved:
So the first winter Erling was away
She hoped and waited for a letter too,
Waited in vain, till she began to fear
He loved no longer, cared no longer for her.
She feared her feigned indifference had quenched
The kindling ardor in his youthful breast.--
But when on Whitsunday the following spring
She met him at the church she was relieved:
She saw he loved her yet and felt assured
That he some day would come and speak his love;
So when he pressed her hand she in return
His gently pressed, and thus her love for him
Was strengthened by the knowledge of his love.

A year passed by, and yet he had not spoke,
Nor sought her company, and she began
Regret the false indifference she assumed
When first her love had dawned upon her mind,

And afterwards, until she was confirmed:
She felt that it had been the cruel cause
Of sorrow to them both, and most to him,
And of his silence now: he feared, perhaps,
She liked him not, nor ever could him love?

'Twas June, the third of June, the day the jaekt,
And Erling, on the summer tour should start.
And Inger knew the day: last time at church
Erling had told her of the trip, and named
The day he was to sail, and when he hoped,
If all went well, he should be home again.
And he had added as he bade farewell:
"But I may see you yet before we sail."
Now Inger had resolved that Sunday morn,
If they should meet, she would encourage him,
And, were it possible, in some modest way
To let him know she loved him—now she could not:
For blushingly she thought he meant to come
And speak his love before he went away.—

Since then she'd waited for him every day,
And every eventide ; he had not come.
To-day he was to sail. Why came he not?
He long had loved her. Then, why spoke he not?

'Twas after noon when Inger took her work
And went upon the island's eastern side,
From where she well could see the vessel pass,
And Erling too, perhaps, upon the deck.—
Soft from the south there came a gentle breeze,
And warm the day, and hot the solar rays ;
So down she sat within the cooler shade
Of a projecting rock. —Long sat she there
And knitted, waiting for the jaekt and him.— —
Why came she not? For surely this the day
He said they were to sail. Why came she not?
She wondered as she looked across the fjord,
And waited for the jaekt that never came.
She sat and knitted till her back did ache,
Then she lay down to wait and think of him.— --

— — — — — — — — — — — — — — --

When she awoke 'twas late. The evening sun

Stood low upon the western sky. 'Twas cold:
The wind had changed; now blowing from the
north.
She woke and felt so heavy and so chilled,
And tried to rise, and tried to lift her arm--
But could not, for her side was lame and numb.
"I must have lain too long upon the side;
It is asleep, so I must wait a while,"
She thought, and tried to turn upon the left,—
The right was numb,—but found it difficult.
— — —"How cold I am! How long it stays
asleep!
Why wakes it not?" she shuddered many times,
And with the other hand she pinched her side,
And pinched the sleeping arm and raised it up,
To let the languid blood flow down from it.
Of no avail: her side remained asleep.—
As she lay waiting thus cold horror crept
Unmerciful across her puzzled mind:
She had heard of people being paralyzed
By sleeping on the ground in early spring.

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But she? No, no, it could not be! For God—
And He was love itself, He loved us all—
He could not mean to punish her for this!
'Twas love that brought her here—pure love and true—
And yet, why did it not begin to prick
And tingle, as her limbs had oft before,
When gone asleep by too long lying on them?
— —"My side is palsied, and for life, perhaps!
O God, have mercy for the love of Him
Who came on earth to suffer for us all!
Have mercy on me, strike me not with this!"

— — — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

When Inger went away that afternoon
Her mother saw her go and understood
Both why and where she went; for long ere this
Inger had told her all, asked her advice,
And also told her that he was to sail.—
Now when her daughter after many hours
Did not return she went to seek for her,
And found her lying thus in great distress.—

She went and brought her husband to her aid,
Who took his daughter in his mighty arms,
Carried her home, and laid her on his bed;
Then with all possible haste he went away
To summon to her side who best could tell
What the affliction and what should be done.

Within an hour the district doctor came,
Who, after the examination, said:
"'Tis early yet to tell. But don't despair.
Cheer up, my girl! We'll fetch you round, I hope."
But outside to her parents ere he left:
"I fear the worst. Her side is paralyzed.
She may recover, though I doubt it much."

XIV.

THE midnight hour, midsummer-night.
Eight bells
On board the jaekt "Maria," southward bound.
A day from Lofoten, and now becalmed
Upon the broad, majestic northern main,
But slowly drifting northward with the stream,
The mighty ocean river from the Gulf.—
Long waves came gently rolling from the north,
The vessel lulling, as the nurse the child,
Upon the ocean's bosom. Still the night
And hushed, save for the sighing of the sea
Around the vessel as she rose and sank,
A tireless sea-gull's cry, and now and then

The thunderous breathing of a mighty whale.—
Above the eastern level rose the coast,
The bold and rugged, and the lofty peaks;
But in the northern sky the midnight-sun,
Rayless and red: the north a fairy-land.

Since eight o'clock had Erling been on deck;
His watch the starboard watch; the port relieved
At twelve; the starboard went below to sleep,
Save Erling, who remained on deck a while
In meditation lost:

"— — —'Twas better thus.
She is so loving and so kind and true,
She would have loved him all the better for it,
If he had sickened with a palsied side:
So when, on my return, I should demand
The palsy taken off, and he be well,
Their union would be stronger than before.—
But now 'tis she—it cost me much to do it,
But I could not surrender to despair,
And ever live the sad and gloomy life,
From man secluded, like my poor old friend;

Aye, worse than Jacob—she another's wife,
And I the conscious cause of all my woe—
I had to do it! Yes, I had to do it,
And try recover yet the chance I lost
In idle waiting for an older day.—
I had to do it, there was no other way,
Though much it cost, an agony to ask
The Lappish sorcerer palsy Inger's side!
But it is painless—not in pain she lies,
One side benumbed—in bed, perhaps—no pain!
She is not suffering. And fickle Per,
So light of mind and heart, so like a child,
So thoughtless, careless, will not see her even,
Will stay away, and, long ere I return,
He will have found another girl to love,
Another one to give the finger-ring.
And Inger, hearing this, though sad at first,
Will soon be glad she was not wed to him.
And when I'm home again, and she is well,
Then this will prove the better for us all,
Then I no longer shall delay— — — —"

XV.

A THURSDAY morning late in August month
The jaekt was sighted off the point, and soon
She cast her anchors in the pleasant bay
Below the home of Erling. When the sail
Was furled and covered, everything made snug,
Each member of the crew went to his home
To rest until the following Monday morn,
When all were to be back to help unload.

Now Per had seen the vessel when she came
Upon the fjord, and in the afternoon
He came to welcome Erling back, and hear

About the trip.—On board the jaekt they sat,
A while on deck, another while below,
And Erling told about the trip—but most
About the town.—"And did you buy the ring?"
"I did—and here it is!" "I thank you much!
'Tis for a girl, and can you guess for whom?"
"I cannot guess." "It is for Ingelborg,
Your sister: She and I have been engaged
Since early spring, since Easter-tide; to-day
I hope to ask your parents for her hand.
I would have told you ere you went away,
The day I asked you buy the ring; but then
You seemed so out of spirits; so I thought
'Twas better wait till you came back again.—
But are you sick, Erling, you are so pale?"
"Ah, Per, my friend, had you but told me then!
Forgive me! And may God forgive me too!
But leave me now, for I must be alone!"
"Forgive you? I have nothing to forgive.
But you are sick; I cannot leave you now!"
"No, no! I am not sick, so leave me, Per!

Go, speak unto my parents. I shall come
And join you all within an hour or two."—
So Per departed—Erling sat alone.— — —

When Erling two hours later came ashore,
His sister, who had seen him leave the jaekt,
To meet him came: "They know and have
consented!
See here! The ring!"—"Let me congratulate!
May you be happy, sister! Happy with him!"—
"I am happy! But happier still by far
I would have been if Inger were not sick.
Oh, Erling, how I sorrow for you both!
I know you love her, and she too loves you.
It was for love of you she now is sick:
She had been told the day you were to sail,
But knew not that it was put off a day;
So when you should have sailed she went to see
The jaekt, and you, pass by: thus bid farewell.
She waited all the afternoon, until
At last she went to sleep.—When she awoke
Her side was palsied."—Erling, hearing this,

Hearing of Inger's love for him, now groaned
And drooped and shook in greatest agony.

'Twas late that eve, long after Per had left,
That Erling took his boat and sailed away,
And in the morn he gained the isle where dwelled
The sorcerer—and, landing, saw not that
There was no boat—but hastened to the hut,
To find the Lapp and have the thing undone,
And have undone what had been wrongly done,
And have him take the palsy from the girl
Who loved him even more than he loved her.

But at the hut he stopped with bulging eyes:
The door was gone, the roof was tumbling down,
Within were cobwebs everywhere, no sign
Of human habitation there for months.
"But what is this?" he cried. "Where is the Lapp?"—
Then, as the truth flashed 'cross his mind, he reeled,
And threw himself prone on the ground and moaned:

"O God Almighty, punish for this not her,
The innocent, the pure, the good and true!
'Tis all my fault. Why did I seek the Lapp?
'Twas for myself! I did not think of her.
O God in heaven! Help me find the Lapp,
That he may take 't away, and she be well!
— — — —.— — — — — — — — — — — — —
Find him I must, he must be hunted up!"
He rose and went down to the little boat,
And took the oars and pulled with mighty strokes
Towards the nearest isle inhabited,
Where, at the landing, an old man he met,
A fisherman, to whom he hoarsely cried,
Accosting thus: "Where is the Lapp?"—
"What Lapp?"—
"Why, he who dwelled in yonder island hut!"—
"He's gone."—"Gone where, and when?"—
"Last June he went.
Jens Gooseisle, who was fishing at the time,
Said he went northward. That is all we
know."—

"Northward—and when will he be back?"—
"Back here?"—
"Yes."—"I don't think he ever will be back."—
"And why? Man, tell me why!"—"Because
he sold
His fishing-nets and lines before he left."—
"But tell me where he went! Where is he
now?"—
"I suppose he went to Lapland to his kin."—
"And where are they?"—"God knows. He
never told."

As Erling homeward worked his weary way
Against the fresh wind blowing from the south,
He set his mind upon one single thought,
Beating it in with every forceful stroke:
"Find him I must; he must be hunted up."

XVI.

A WEEK thereafter Erling started off
Upon his long search for the sorcerer.
First to the islet group where he had dwelled,
Then northward, ever northward, although oft
With many a deviation from the route
To isles and points and lengthy winding fjords
Inquiring, asking, hunting for the Lapp;
Now with success, but oftener in vain.
And once, when he a month had lost his trail,
He went to Jockmock, 'cross the Swedish line,
Unto the hub of Lappish necromancy,
Consulting all the sorcerers there; but none

Of them could help him. "Only he," said they,
'Who caused the sickness could take it away."

So Erling then his weary search resumed,
And now ere long he found the long lost trail,
Leading him northward, ever northward, north;
Then, turning to the northeast, eastward, east,
Along the weatherbeaten Finmark coast;
Then south, into a deep and open fjord.—

Meanwhile the autumn into winter slipped;
The nomad Lapps the summer pastures left,
And took their herds to mossy inland heights;
The sun departed for another pole,
And on the sky the ghastly northlight rose,
Loud crackling, hissing, with its flaming tongues,
Forever changing: red, green, yellow, black;
The year grew old and died—a new was born;
The southern sky grew paler day by day,
Then red and golden, and one chilly noon
A lonesome sunny ray peeped o'er the hill;

All Finmark round the mountain Lapps prepared
Their sledges and their finest deer to go
Unto the winter fair at Karasjok.
And they began to arrive from everywhere,
By ones, in strings, upon untraveled roads.
They came to buy and sell, to see, be seen,
Some to be married, some to find a wife.

Among those coming that year to the fair,
Up from the coast, was Erling; for the trail
Had led him on into the fjord which lies
Below the valley, where the fair was held.
And here he hoped to meet the sorcerer,
Or hear of him, at least, among the Lapps
Now gathered at the yearly winter fair.—
And he succeeded. On the second day
The fair was held, he asked a mountain Lapp—
And he had asked three-score since yester morn—
Who told him Lasse—this the sorcerer's name—
Would surely come ere evening to the fair,
And showed the booth where he would likely
stop.

Ere yet the southern sky had wholly changed
From pale to starry blue, from out the west
A panting reindeer, with an empty sledge,
Came rushing to the village Karasjok.
Here it was lassoed by a sprightly youth,
And soon a crowd stood round the angry deer
Inquiring whose it was? And how? And where?—
Ere long the deer and sledge were recognized,
And two—three men set out upon the trail,
To find the hapless driver.—In an hour
The men returned and brought a dying Lapp.—
'Twas thought that he had driven the deer too long,
Till it was angered and had turned upon him;
And he had not been quick enough to turn
The sledge and hide himself below it, thus
Avoid the angry reindeer's deadly hoofs.
For he, so it was told, had been away,
Until last autumn, more than fifteen years
Among the Norsemen, fishing on the coast;
So he was out of practice with the deer,

"Ere yet the southern sky had whòlly changed." P. 122.

And old and stiffened from the many years
Of cramped-up life within the fishing-boat.

Into the booth that had been pointed out
To Erling as the one the sorcerer
Would likely stop at when he should arrive,
The dying Lapp was carried.—Here he died,
As Erling entered, saw and recognized
The wrinkled face—he had found the sorcerer.

XVII.

'TWAS fifteen summers later. Fifteen years
Since Erling from his Bergen trip returned.
'Twas fall again, a quiet day in fall,
And at the sacred acre of the Lord,
On Horseshoe Isle, there was a funeral.—
The pastor spoke: "— — — — — — — —
— — — — — Such love as hers, my friends!
Such patience, such resignment to the will
Of Him without Whom not a sparrow falls
Upon the ground, was seldom seen before.
Struck with a palsied side in early youth,

Full fifteen years a helpless invalid,
Yet no one ever knew her to complain!
She always, with that sweet and pleasant smile,
So angel-like, which we shall ne'er forget,
But ever miss hereafter, when we come
To Indre-ey, greeted whoever came
To visit her, reaching her little hand,
Yet sound, so thankful for each given hour.
Oh, blessed hours were those! So near to God!—
Now she is gone—she is an angel now.

— — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

"But ere we bid the dear departed one
A last farewell, let us remember him
Whose love did not abate when she fell sick,
Who has devoted all these many years
To comfort and to ease her saddened life.
Pure was their love and true, and although they
Were not to be united here below,
His love and hers, their love, was not in vain,
For they have been example to us all—

Example of devotedness and love,
Of constant love, such as is seldom found.
And our sincerest gratitude is due,
And thanks, for what they were within our
midst!—
Now she is gone. But when his time shall come,
She will be waiting for him at the gate."

— — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

So she was buried; slowly tolled the bell,
And slowly from the symbol of good-luck,
The towering mountains round, the echo came,
And, mingling with the tolling of the bell,
Bid Inger Indre-ey a last farewell.

XVIII.

'TWAS toward night the following Christmas eve.—
Erling had been to Horseshoe Island church
To decorate for Christmas Inger's grave
With stones and sand and wreaths of evergreen.
Now he was going home.—From out the west
A hurried breeze did blow: so Erling took
Some long and heavy stones and firmly placed
Beneath the cross-beams of his little boat
For ballast. Then he pulled around the point,
And hoisted sail—and homeward sped the boat.—

But in the tower of the church the bell
Began ring in the holy Christmastide.

Now Erling, almost thirteen years ago,
Had passed the udal rights he held by law
As oldest son unto his younger brother:
No more he needed them, he said, no more
He needed the paternal home and farm
Now she was ill, now she was struck for life
Who should have helped him make a home of it,
She who alone could make a home of it
For him; and all he now should need would be
A room, and meals when hungry—nothing more.—
And so his brother married; got the farm.

This Christmas eve at Erling's brother's home,
And Erling's too, as homeward sped the boat,
The many candles on the Christmas tree
Were lighted, and around it in a ring
The wife and children merrily danced and sang.

And with them, with the youngest on his arm,
The happy master of the happy house.
And, smiling, in his chair the grandsire sat,
And near the window sat his wrinkled wife,
Now watching those who merrily danced and sang,
Now, anxious, looking through the window-pane.

Speedily wafted by the western breeze,
The boat flew homeward till it reached the point
Which from the fjord the smaller bay divides,
Where, at the head, the home of Erling lay.
Here puffy was the wind: now calm the bay,
Now whipped and ruffled by a forceful gust
Descending from the lofty mountain sides.—
As Erling came around the point and saw
The lighted house, the many blinking lights,
Sad thoughts were forced on his remorseful mind:
It might have been—it could have been his own
And Inger's children who were dancing now,

Merrily dancing round the Christmas tree,
If he had— — —

Down the towering mountain side
A mighty gust came sweeping on the bay,
And, as it crossed, it struck the tiny craft,
Then sighing, moaning, up the other side
It went, and joined the airy waves that came
Fast eastward o'er the shrouded peaks, and brought
The tollings of the distant parish bell.

But far below the peaks the bay once more
So restful lay—so peaceful — — and so calm.

THE END.

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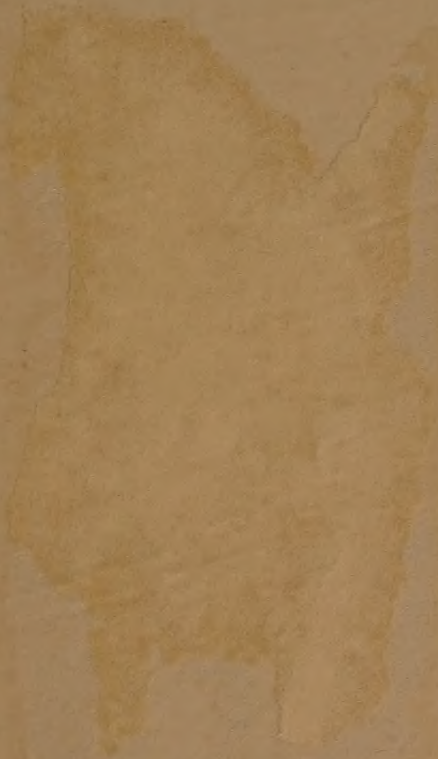

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